

Great Western

No. 11.

THE

CHRISTIAN VOLUNTEER.

"His eye was sleek and gentle; and a smile
Play'd on his lips; and in his speech was heard
Paternal sweetness, dignity and power.
The perception dwelt in his breast
Was to an audience, good or ill."

(COWPER.)

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PROVIDENCE.

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1823.

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THE
CHRISTIAN VISITOR.

Then, pilgrim, turn, thy cares forego ;
For earth-born cares are wrong :
Man wants but little, here below,
Nor wants that little long.

GOLDSMITH.

VOL. I. NOVEMBER, 1823. No. 11.

ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

A Sermon, for Thanksgiving,

NOVEMBER 20, 1823.

"Give us this day, our daily bread."

MATTHEW, VI. II.

In the context, the Lord Jesus Christ describes and condemns the improper conduct of hypocrites in respect to their alms and their prayers. He then teaches in what manner and with what motives all persons ought to pray. In this connection, he taught that form of prayer, which is commonly called the Lord's Prayer. This prayer he introduces by saying, "After this manner, therefore, pray ye." By the manner of prayer, he appears to have respect to the order and the importance of the subjects which ought to engage our attention and affections in prayer. In explaining the Lord's prayer, it has usually been divided into six petitions besides the introduction and conclusion. The first petition in this prayer respects the glory of God; the second, the ad-

vancement of his kingdom; the third, universal obedience on earth to his holy will; and the fourth, the bestowment of temporal blessings. The fourth petition is contained in the words of our text: "Give us this day our daily bread." In this petition we are taught to pray, "that of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life and enjoy his blessings with them.*" The request in this petition includes every temporal blessing, that may be necessary and convenient. What the Saviour has taught and required in the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, then, places before us the following sentiment: all persons ought to pray to God for temporal blessings. To illustrate this sentiment, it is proposed,

I. To show what prayer to God for temporal blessings implies; and,

II. To show why all persons ought to pray to God for such blessings.

I. It is proposed to show what prayer to God for temporal blessings implies:

1. They, who pray to God for temporal blessings, are sensible that they need such blessings from him. No person is disposed to ask for any favors, which he does not feel that he needs. Nor will a person ask favors of any being, from whom he does not feel that he needs any favors. No one, then, will deliberately and seriously pray unto God for temporal blessings, unless he is sensible that he needs such blessings from him. All mankind are constantly and deeply sensible, that they need temporal enjoyments. But they are not universally nor generally sensible, that they need blessings from God for the supply of their temporal necessities. They, who

* Assembly's Catechism.

are indulged with an abundance of worldly possessions and enjoyments, are commonly regardless and forgetful of God, and wholly unwilling to realize that they need any favors from him. Such wicked persons, as "spend their days in wealth," are declared in the scriptures to say unto God, on account of their temporal prosperity and enjoyments, "depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" And such wicked persons, as are not wealthy, are commonly unwilling to realize that they need favors from God. But whether any persons be rich or poor, they daily need a multitude of temporal blessings, which God only can bestow. They, who pray to God for such blessings, are sensible that it is in him they live and move and have their being, and that they daily and constantly need from him such temporal blessings as are necessary to their subsistence and comfort in the present life.

2. They, who truly pray to God for temporal blessings, are sensible that they are wholly unworthy of such blessings. Such persons, as imagine they deserve any favor, have nothing of that spirit, which is essential to prayer. They have no heart humbly to ask of God such blessings as they think they may justly demand and as he cannot justly withhold. The foundation and the duty of prayer to God lie chiefly in the unworthiness and ill-desert of human beings. And a conviction and impression of their unworthiness is necessary in order to pray to God with propriety and acceptance. All mankind are sinful and guilty creatures. And they are as unworthy of temporal as of spiritual blessings. They, who pray to God for any blessings as they ought to do, pray to him, not because they are worthy, but because

they are unworthy of the blessings they need. Pious persons, in exact proportion to their progress in piety, have always been sensible of their unworthiness of any favor from God. Jacob said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth, which thou hast shown unto thy servant." Such a sense of his unworthiness prepared and disposed him to pray acceptably and prevalently with God for the temporal blessings which he needed. Without a deep and lively impression of his own unworthiness no person will ever truly pray to God for any temporal blessing.

3. They, who pray to God for temporal blessings, are sensible that for such blessings they are wholly dependent upon him. The duty of prayer belongs to dependent beings. And no persons are ever prayerful any farther than they are sensible of their dependence upon God. All human beings are wholly dependent upon God for every temporal blessing and enjoyment, which they ever experience. They cannot live a moment without his preserving power and mercy. Health and strength of body, soundness of mind, the proper relish of food and its nutritious influence, employment and success in temporal affairs, are the gift of God. For these blessings the affluent and the needy are equally dependent upon his power and mercy. Nor can a single temporal blessing be obtained or enjoyed by any human being without divine providence. God gives genius and skill to the mechanic and manufacturer; judgment and success to the merchant; discretion and industry to the farmer. Without the light and heat of the sun, and the rain, and the dews from heaven, the earth would yield no increase. It is God, who causes "seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night." Without his powerful, constant and faithful

providence the earth would be barren, and its numerous inhabitants would faint and die. The highest and the lowest, the richest and the poorest are constantly and wholly dependent upon God for every temporal blessing. And a sense of their entire dependence upon God for temporal blessings is always implied in praying unto him for spiritual blessings.

4. Prayer to God for temporal blessings implies confidence in him for the supply of our temporal necessities. They, who truly pray to God, fix their attention and their affections upon the natural and moral perfections, which are comprised in his excellent and glorious character. And in his character they perceive a sufficient and permanent foundation for the highest confidence of all his rational creatures. All his perfections are united and displayed in making temporal provision for the constant and numerous necessities of the human family.—And they have great reason to confide in him for temporal blessings. He knows their necessities; and he has power, wisdom and goodness, sufficient to supply all their wants. Without holy confidence in God, the spirit of prayer never exists in any human being. Such confidence God requires and deserves in respect to the bestowment of temporal blessings. Whatever temporal possessions any persons may now enjoy, and whatever labors and means they may use to procure temporal blessings, they have constant reason and occasion to trust in God. Hence, Paul says to Timothy, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." All persons are bound to trust in God and in him wholly and only for temporal blessings. The very spirit of prayer for spiritual blessings, implies such confidence in God.

5. Prayer to God for temporal blessings implies submission to his will in respect to these favors. There is no medium between submission and opposition to the will of God. Opposition to his will is enmity against him. But with the spirit of enmity against God no person ever has the spirit of prayer. They, who truly pray for temporal blessings, are persuaded that God knows better than they know how to give and withhold such blessings. And they believe, that he is disposed to do what is best. They are therefore contented and satisfied with his providential dispensations in respect to temporal possessions and enjoyments. The hearts of all persons are frequently and thoroughly tried by the conduct of God in the bestowment of temporal blessings. But they, who truly pray to him, learn to be submissive to his will. Confidence in God, which is always connected with a spirit of prayer, is the foundation of submission. It must be conceded, on the slightest attention to the subject, that a spirit, that is unsubmissive and opposed to the will of God, is directly and totally contrary to such affections as are essential to the true spirit of prayer. They, who truly pray to God, submit their views and feelings and interests to his wise and holy purpose. They wait upon him to receive what he is pleased to give, and to be denied what he thinks best to withhold. Having shown what prayer to God for temporal blessings implies, it is now proposed,

II. To show why all persons should pray to God for such blessings.

The very condition of mankind, in respect to their temporal interests, renders it proper that they should pray to God for the common blessings of this life. And this duty God requires and enjoins upon us in the holy scriptures. In the words of our text we are taught daily to

pray to God for our daily bread. By the Apostle it is written—"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." There are several reasons, that should induce all persons to obey these divine requirements, and pray unto God for temporal blessings.

1. Prayer to God for such blessings will dispose and prepare a person to conduct in a proper manner respecting all his temporal concerns. All persons are bound to regard and obey God in all their conduct and in respect to all their interests. But their worldly concerns generally so engage their attention and engross their affections as to exclude God from their thoughts. And without the fear of God before their eyes, in the eager pursuit of worldly objects, they are exceedingly liable to conduct in an improper and sinful manner for the attainment of temporal possessions and enjoyments. If they do not regard God, they will be strongly tempted in their worldly pursuits to practice falsehood, deceit and injustice towards their fellow-creatures. And they will be still more strongly tempted to neglect and despise the duties which they owe immediately to their Creator. They will not habitually and seriously read and study the Holy Scriptures; nor will they remember and sanctify the Sabbath; nor will they regard the worship of God, either privately or publicly; only in subserviency to their temporal affairs. They who will not so far regard God in their temporal interests, as to pray to him, will so conduct, as to "fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." But prayer to God for temporal blessings will incline a person to conduct honestly and properly in all his designs, labors and transactions respecting his secular interests.

For this reason it is exceedingly important and necessary, that all persons should pray to God for temporal blessings.

2. In order to the proper reception of temporal blessings, prayer to God is important and necessary. Prayer turns and fixes the heart upon God, and leads a person to perceive and realise his perfections, in the provision and bestowment of temporal blessings. They who prayerfully regard God in their temporal possessions and enjoyments, walk and commune with him in these concerns, and perceive and enjoy his presence and providence in the common bounties and blessings of life.—They therefore receive every temporal blessing as an evidence of his existence and perfections, and as an expression of his care, mercy and faithfulness. A prayerful regard to God in the reception of the common blessings of his providence, is the duty of all persons. God blames and condemns his ancient people, because they did not regard him in their hearts, as he manifests his existence and perfections in causing fruitful seasons, and the various productions of the earth. He says, by Jeremiah, “This people hath a revolting and rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season; he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.” And by Habakkuk, God says of his people, “They sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat and their meat plenteous.” Atheism and idolatry in the pursuit and reception of temporal blessing, are exceedingly offensive to God. But these offences are committed by all persons, who have not an heart to acknowledge his providence and to pray unto him in respect to

such blessings. No person, who refuses to pray to God, ever receives the mercies of his providence with a proper spirit.

3. Prayer to God for temporal blessings will prepare a person to make a proper use of such blessings. Such blessings ought to be used with a holy regard to God. He ought to be served and honored in every secular pursuit, and by every temporal blessing. It is written, "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of thine increase." And again, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Temporal blessings and enjoyments are precious gifts of heaven. All such gifts come from the hand of God. "For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." All the blessings of this life ought to be used in such a manner as is pleasing to him. And it is pleasing to God to use such blessings to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of human beings. Such services and benefits as are rendered to our fellow-creatures from right motives, will be approved and rewarded in the day of judgment. The supreme and final judge has said "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." And it is written, "to do good and communicate, forget not: for, with such sacrifices, God is well pleased." Prayer, in respect to temporal blessings, will have a powerful and happy influence to induce persons to regard God and his commands in the use of worldly things. By such prayer they will be constantly excited to "use the world as not abusing it."

4. They, who truly pray to God, will be prepared for the proper enjoyment of temporal blessings. As prayer prepares persons to seek, to receive and use such

blessings in a proper manner, it leads to a proper and peculiar enjoyment of such mercies as God is pleased to give. They, who pray to God, perceive and enjoy his goodness and mercy in the common bounties of his providence. They rejoice in God, while they receive and use the temporal blessings he bestows. The streams of his goodness turn their hearts to the eternal and infinite fountain of all blessings and enjoyments. When persons conduct as they ought to do towards God in their secular affairs, it is their duty and privilege to rejoice in God, as well as in all the expressions of his mercy, which they receive. To such a person, God says, "Go thy way; eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." A right spirit towards God, in respect to temporal blessings, lays a foundation for comfort, contentment and satisfaction in the pursuit and use of the good things of this life. There are then various and important reasons why all persons should obey the requirement of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the words of our text, and pray to God for temporal blessings.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. The subject of the present discourse should lead us to admire the providence of God in the production and bestowment of temporal blessings upon mankind. His providence in supplying the temporal necessities of his creatures is often mentioned in the scriptures. The psalmist says unto God, "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thy hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." Again, he mentions it as a remarkable expression of divine mercy, that God "giveth food to all flesh." And the apostle says of God, "he left not

himself without witness in that he did good and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." God affords human beings all the temporal blessings they ever enjoy, as really as if he directly opened his hand to supply their wants. And this he has done for the whole human family ever since the world was made. To effect this great object he has formed and fitted the earth, the air and the ocean with their numerous appendages, as an immense laboratory for the production of the variety and abundance of good things, which mankind need for their subsistence and enjoyment. To supply the wants of his creatures on earth he orders all the changes of the seasons and governs all the elements. He constantly regards and controls every particle of earth, of air, fire and water. He directs and governs the designs and labors of all human beings, whom he employs as his servants in making provision for their incessant and numerous necessities. Thus God has provided and bestowed upon mankind their temporal blessings and enjoyments nearly six thousand years. And at the present time he has under his watchful eye and constant care about eight hundred millions of human beings, who are wholly dependent upon him every moment for life and breath and all things. To afford his creatures the blessings they need, God is awake while they sleep; he is at work, while they rest; he is ever mindful of all their wants and all their concerns; though they are, commonly, if not always, unmindful of him. Should God for a year withdraw his attention and providence from the world, all its inhabitants must suffer and perish. Should he relax his watchfulness and labor for a week or a day, they could find no relief nor help. Should he for a moment renounce his preserving and governing providence, the earth with its complicated machinery would fall in-

to disorder; and confusion and destruction would instantly overwhelm all its inhabitants. Is not, then, the preserving, governing and nourishing providence of the Almighty Creator to be noticed and admired by all his rational creatures? And is not God himself worthy of their first, constant and supreme regard and affection? His control of the ocean, he thinks, demands and deserves their attention and reverence. It is written, "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?" Surely then, his constant government of the ocean, the earth and the air, with all the heavenly bodies, demand the devout reverence and constant admiration of all his rational creatures. This government he maintains to administer to the necessities of the human family. By the production and bestowment of the common blessings of his providence, God does, every moment, place before the eyes of all mankind the evidences of his existence and the manifestation of his perfections. He manifests his knowledge, wisdom, power, goodness, mercy, faithfulness and sovereignty; and he demands and deserves every day and every hour, the attention, reverence and admiration of the whole human family, for the rich and constant bounties of his common providence.

2. If mankind ought to have a prayerful regard to God in their temporal concerns, then their conduct in this respect affords decisive evidence of their moral depravity and sinfulness. By the temporal blessings which they daily receive and enjoy from the hand of God, they are constantly reminded of his goodness and of their ob-

ligation to him. Yet they disregard and forget God under the bestowment of numerous and precious benefits. The greater the portion of worldly possessions and enjoyments, which God bestows upon human beings, the greater have generally been their stupidity, ingratitude and rebellion against him. Such treatment has God received from mankind in all ages, and nations, while they have been daily loaded with the expressions of his goodness and mercy. But would they so treat their holy and gracious creator, if they were not wholly destitute of goodness, and if their hearts were not full of evil ? Of Israel, it is written, "the Lord made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields ; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock ; butter of kine and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs and rams of the breed of Bashan and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat ; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape." But it is added, "then he forsook God, who made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange Gods ; with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not unto God." By Isaiah, it is written—" Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth ; for the Lord hath spoken : I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib ;—but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Even of the heathen, it is written, " When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful." These descriptions of human depravity and wickedness are strictly applicable to all mankind ; as it is constantly and abundantly evident from their conduct towards God under the reception of temporal blessings.

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They render him evil for good, and hatred for love, and show by their daily conduct, that they have the carnal mind, which is enmity against God. The doctrine of human depravity, then, is not a false notion and vain fiction of austere minds, but is proved by the plainest facts, and by the stupid, sinful and ungrateful conduct of mankind towards their creator, preserver and benefactor.

3. In view of the benefits, which God bestows upon human beings in his common Providence, we perceive decisive evidences of his astonishing mercy. Mercy consists in the exercise and expression of goodness to sinful and guilty creatures. All mankind are by nature totally sinful and exceedingly guilty before God. They do not deserve from him a crumb of bread, a drop of water, or a breath of air. But they deserve his present and eternal displeasure and are condemned to endless punishment by the law, which is holy, just and good.— Yet it is upon such sinful and guilty creatures, that God bestows the variety and abundance of his temporal blessings. All these blessings are the production and the effects of his mercy. These blessings are bestowed daily and hourly upon mankind over all the earth.— They are bestowed upon the impenitent, as well as the penitent, upon sinners, as well as saints. God then manifests before the whole world, that he is good and does good ; that he is good to all, and that his tender mercies are over all his works. Abundant and decisive and constant evidences and expressions of his mercy are before us in the blessings, which he bestows upon all mankind in his common Providence. Every day and every hour proclaims, by the common bounties of divine providence, the truth of the psalmist's words ;— “The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.”

4. The reasons which should induce all persons to pray unto God for temporal blessings, shew us the powerful and happy influence of real religion upon human conduct in respect to temporal affairs. Real religion affects and governs the hearts and actions of human beings in respect to all their concerns. It is impossible for a person to regard God in his spiritual interests, and yet disregard him in his temporal interests. The instructions of the scriptures direct us how to conduct in our secular pursuits, and enforce our duty in this respect by the highest and strongest motives. If a person make a profession of religion, and think himself to be a christian, and yet have not the fear of God before his eyes in his temporal interests and transactions, he has no evidence of real piety. They, who fear God, will regard man. A person cannot live a life of prayer and piety and yet be covetous, deceitful, unkind and false in his conduct towards his fellow creatures. Real piety and prayer will dispose a person to pursue, receive, use and enjoy temporal blessings as God commands. The influence of religion is exceedingly practical, powerful and happy in respect to the things of this life.

5. This subject affords a proper answer to the hard question of prosperous sinners. Such persons, as have no proper regard to God, are frequently exalted and prosperous in their temporal pursuits, professions and enjoyments. And therefore they say of God, "what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" Mankind are naturally disposed to imagine, that they can gain nothing by a life of prayer and piety. If sinners prosper in their worldly concerns, in which they have their chosen portion, they silence every call, offer and warning from God, by the question—"What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" How shall we answer this question? And,

especially, how shall we answer it in respect to the pursuits and blessings of this life? Are not piety and prayer rather a loss than a gain in temporal affairs? Without piety and prayer, whatever we may pursue, possess and enjoy in worldly objects, we have not nor can we have the blessing of God. And without his blessing there is no real safety nor happiness for any human being. But it was a proverb in Israel, "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich and he addeth no sorrow with it." Again, "Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith." And again, "Better is a little, that a righteous man hath than the riches of many wicked!" And the apostle declares, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." We may, then, by the light of truth, easily answer the hard question of prosperous sinners. By praying to God, there is gained every thing, which this life can afford. Piety and prayer make "all things work together for good to them that love God." And prayer gains, through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, the kingdom of perfect and eternal blessedness and glory in heaven. Again,

6. All persons ought to praise God for the temporal blessings which he is pleased to give. All these blessings flow from his hand, and are the fruits of his power and wisdom, of his care and kindness, mercy and faithfulness. And shall no tribute of praise and thanks be given for the rich and constant gifts of his providence? The pious planters of the New-England colonies and churches had their minds so impressed and affected with the duty and importance of prayer and praise to God for temporal blessings, that they annually devoted two days to these religious duties. They devoted one day in the early part of the year to fasting and prayer for the ble-

sing of God upon the following seasons, and one day near the close of the year to prayer and praise for the mercies of his providence in their temporal pursuits and enjoyments. To pious people in New-England, the annual thanksgiving has been a season of serious reflection and prayer, as well as of humble and joyful praise. For two hundred years, this anniversary has been observed in New-England. A history lately published has the following statement, which shows what was probably the origin of New-England thanksgivings. "The Plymouth colony began to experience the distresses of famine.—By the time their planting was finished in 1623, their provision was exhausted. They had neither bread nor corn for three or four months. A drought continued from May until some time in July. Under these afflictions, however, they appointed a day of fasting and prayer, to humble themselves and seek unto God. Notwithstanding all their fears, a plentiful harvest followed, which they suitably noticed by a day of thanksgiving and prayer."* Such was the spirit and practice of our pious ancestors towards God in respect to their temporal interests. And the present generation have great and special reasons to praise God for their temporal privileges and enjoyments. God has crowned the present year with his goodness in the plentiful and precious productions of the earth. And great is our debt of gratitude to him this day for the temporal mercies of the year that is drawing to its close. And now, my hearers, have you a heart to pay this debt of praise to your constant and bountiful Preserver and Benefactor? Do you regard God in your temporal pursuits, interests and enjoyments? Do you consider how greatly and constant-

* Goodrich's History.

ly you need blessings from God? Are you sensible that you are unworthy of the least of his common mercies? Are you sensible of your entire dependence upon God for life and breath and all things? Have you a spirit of humble and holy confidence in God, respecting your temporal interests and necessities? Are you contented and submissive in respect to what he gives and withholds? Or, to answer all these questions in a word, do you realize and perform the great duty of prayer to God for temporal blessings? And does the spirit of piety, of prayer and praise, influence your affections and actions in the pursuit, reception, use and enjoyment of the bounties and blessings of divine providence? These serious and pertinent questions ought to engage your attention on the present anniversary. And may they lead and quicken you to a life of prayer and praise to God respecting all your temporal interests and enjoyments. Then you will practice that "godliness, which is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." AMEN.

The Unreasonableness of Indecision in Religion---No. 4.

MANY, who indulge a hope that they are the subjects of true religion, remain undecided in regard to some very important points of christian practice. Although they are well acquainted with the precepts of the gospel, and with the general practice of those who have been distinguished for their piety and usefulness; yet, in numerous instances, their minds are in painful suspense in regard to what they shall and what they shall not do.

There are not a few who entertain a hope of their own piety, that are undetermined with respect to a public *profession* of their faith. At times, they resolve openly to manifest their love to Christ, by uniting with his people, and remembering him in the ordinance of the Holy Supper. But by some means or other, this resolution is soon shaken, and they remain, from year to year, visibly among those who deny Christ.

Some heads of families, who believe that they are not strangers to religion, are undecided in regard to the duty of family prayer. When they consider how plainly this duty is inculcated in the scriptures, how exactly it corresponds with the dictates of reason, and what beneficial effects it is calculated to produce, they are almost constrained to perform it. But soon, perhaps, they begin to listen to the plea, which none are backward to make when an exemption from duty is their object, that they have not suitable gifts. This, joined with the consideration that it is an unfashionable duty, that it will require them to be more circumspect in their general conduct, in order that one part may correspond with another, and that if they are constant and faithful in the duty of secret prayer, the Lord, regarding the peculiar

circumstances of their case, may wink at this neglect, influences them to dispense with it. Thus, with a hope that they are doing right, and a fear that they are wrong ; sometimes impressed with a sense of its importance, at others, careless of its benefits ; one day, almost willing to take up the cross and perform the duty ; the next, attempting to palliate their neglect by a thousand frivolous excuses, multitudes wear away an unfaithful and an unhappy life.

The religious instruction and government of children, are duties, respecting which, many professors of religion seem undecided. Although it can hardly be supposed, that any doubt their obligations to perform these duties, yet, multitudes seem to be halting between a determination to perform and a determination to neglect them, as though they knew not which to serve, God, or their own inclinations. They see, from numerous melancholly examples, that a child, left to himself, bringeth his parents to shame ; and they learn from observation, as well as from the scriptures, that children, who have never been instructed in religion, generally grow up in ignorance, and live without hope, and without God in the world.—When they consider these things, the strength of parental affection, joined with a sense of duty, often produces in their minds a resolution to be faithful to their children. For a time, they give them religious instructions, and impose upon them those restraints, which are thought necessary to keep them from the paths of vice. But they soon begin to listen to the children's opportunity for liberty, grow weary in teaching them the things in which they appear to take little interest, and practically adopt, by degrees, the fatal maxim, that, to be independent and impartial, children must form their sentiments, and order their conduct, free from the influence of parental authority.

Many, who possess religion, appear to be undecided with respect to any special efforts to promote it. That any one who considers religion as the one thing needful; who acknowledges that this alone can impart substantial enjoyment in the present life, and open the doors of heaven to sinners hereafter, should be backward in exertions to promote it, is truly astonishing. Much more astonishing is it that those who profess to have felt its power upon their own hearts, and who have publicly laid themselves under obligation to obey its dictates, should appear indifferent in regard to its general prevalence.— But how many there are who hesitate when an opportunity is presented of giving religious instruction to a perishing sinner; who are in doubt respecting what to do when it is necessary to administer reproof to the wicked; who would rather see the institutions of the gospel demolished, than to risk their popularity by using their influence to support them. Although it is known, that millions of the human race are destitute of the gospel, and that the means of sending it to them are wanting; yet, how many do we find too parrimonious to contribute a mite for this important purpose. Between the saving of a small sum of money, and the hope of rescuing a soul from death, they appear to be halting.

Many professors of religion are undecided in regard to the prevailing maxims of the world. They have never given themselves the trouble to compare these with the precepts of the gospel. In many instances, therefore, they cannot readily determine whether the practices of those around them are consistent with the gospel, or not. When inclined to indulge themselves in any particular amusement, they generally go with the multitude, not much concerned whether their conduct is after the example of Christ, or in opposition to the gospel. With

respect to such scandalous sins, as intemperance, fornication, theft, and murder, they are generally decided.—So fully are they convicted of the criminality of these, that when tempted to commit them, they can usually say, with Joseph, “ How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God ? ” But when their own private interest appears to come in competition with the public good ; when under temptation, to take revenge for injuries received ; when a choice is to be made between this world’s goods, and spiritual things ; when they have a leisure hour, which may be spent, either in devotion or vain amusement ; when, by one mode of conduct, they can obtain the praise of men, and by another the approbation of God, they are often in suspense, and appear to know not how to act. Like the Israelites, who had not determined which to serve, God or Baal, they are halting between two opinions.

Now it must be obvious to every person of the slightest reflection, that this indecision in regard to so many important points of christian practice, is peculiarly unreasonable. The word of God in its precepts and prohibitions is intelligible to every one, who is disposed to know his duty. If there are not particular precepts, there are general laws, which are suited to the regulation of human conduct in every circumstance of life.—Those who make the scripture their study, and carefully treasure up in their memories the precepts, and prohibitions of the sacred writers, need not frequently be at a loss to know what they ought, and what they ought not to do. The neglect of the necessary means of knowledge on this subject is unreasonable, and without excuse. They ought to be decided, not only against every act of gross immorality, but against every fashionable deviation from the order of Christ’s house.

They ought to be resolved to perform not only those duties which are expressly commanded, but all those which are evidently implied in, and inferred from the example and precepts of Christ.

It is unreasonable that any who hope they are the disciples of Christ should remain undecided in regard to a public profession of their faith, as he has virtually said to all his followers, "Do this in remembrance of me," they cannot turn their backs upon his table without casting reproach upon his cause, and endangering their own spiritual welfare. They ought to be decided upon this subject, and cheerfully take up their cross and follow Christ, remembering, that "he that is not with him, is against him, and that he that gathereth not with him, scattereth abroad."

Every head of a family ought to be decided with respect to the duty of family prayer, and the religious instruction of those committed to their charge. He should never suffer his mind to be in suspense between the performance and neglect of these duties, but regarding the glory of God, the spiritual welfare of his family, and the peace of his own mind, he should cheerfully submit to all the labour and self-denial which the faithful performance of them may require.

It is unreasonable for the professed followers of Christ not to stand ready to make every exertion in their power for the promotion of religion. They should boldly come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. They ought, without hesitation, to improve every suitable opportunity of instructing the ignorant, of reclaiming the vicious, and of promoting the honour of religion in the world. They should not be afraid to call in question the false maxims, and to frown upon the sinful practices of the world. Whatever opposes itself to the

precepts of Christ, they should always be ready to discourage, both by word and example. By an enlightened, consistent and decided course in religion, they might let their light shine before men, and glorify their Father who is in heaven.

A.

EXTRACTS.

Sunday Sickness.

Doctor Easy, amongst other papers, has given me one containing the particulars of the disease which is represented by the patients as a natural, but, which, he thinks, bears the symptoms of a moral disorder. I shall give his history of it in the present number.

There is a disease, at this time, too prevalent in our neighbourhood, an account of which is not to be found in our popular books of medicine : I shall, therefore, endeavour to communicate some particulars respecting it.

The disease, to which I refer, is evidently of the intermitting kind ; and in all cases, that have fallen under my notice, has attacked the patients by violent paroxysms which return every seventh day. It may be thought to savour of superstition to mention it, and yet it is a fact, and therefore must not be passed over, that these paroxysms return only on the Lord's day, on which account the disease is called the *Sunday sickness* : and the faculty know it by no other name than *Diei Domini-
ci Morbus*. On account of its periodical attacks, some have thought it to be a regular kind of ague, especially, as it is attended with a great degree of coldness, though I do not perceive the symptoms of shivering which are usual in that complaint.

I have observed the paroxysms commence at different periods, but generally in the morning of the Lord's day, and in many cases it seizes the patient before he has left his bed, and makes him indisposed to rise till a later hour than usual. A coldness has been first noticed about the region of the heart; and a dullness in the head, which stupifies the brain, not unusually succeeds: this is followed by yawning, and a sort of lethargy. The patient is, sometimes, deprived of the use of his limbs, especially the legs and the feet, so that he finds himself indisposed to walk to the house of God. Some, indeed, have gone up to the solemn assembly; but they have generally entered it later than their neighbours; and even there the paroxysms have seized them, and the symptoms of yawning and lethargy have been so violent, that they have fallen into a dead sleep, even when the preacher has been delivering the most solemn truths, in the most animated manner: And others have been extremely uneasy in their confinement during the time of service, though they have been known to sit very contentedly, in a play-house, for several hours together.

This disease appears to stupify those who are subject to it, so that, however they may appear to suffer, they are seldom, if ever, heard to complain. I have known persons under other diseases mourn on account of their confinement from public worship; but the victims of this extraordinary disorder were never heard to exclaim, " My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord : my heart, and my flesh crieth out for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God?"

I was at first greatly surprized, after hearing that a patient could not get to public worship, to find her the next day as active as if she had not been subject to any

kind of indisposition; but I have since found it very common, after the paroxysms are removed, for the patient to appear perfectly well till the approach of the next sabbath; though most of the faculty agree, that, there is a low feverish heat to be perceived during the days of interval, which is called *Febris mundi*; or the worldly fever. There seems also to be a loss of appetite for savory food, and an entire want of relish for *pannis viteæ*, which, it is thought, might be of service to remove their disease, as a very skilful and experienced person has asserted, that, "it was more to him than his necessary food;" and another has recommended it as peculiarly agreeable to the taste, "sweeter than honey or the honey-comb." One circumstance I had almost forgotten, namely, that, those who have not laid aside all attention to the form of religion, if they are subject to the Sunday sickness, generally, feel somewhat chill, and listless about the hours of secret retirement, and family devotion.

From some symptoms, in the families where this disease has made its appearance, there is reason to fear that it is contagious. If I am not strangely mistaken, some children have received the infection from their parents; and I expect every week to see it more prevalent in the vicinity of a great family who are dreadfully under the power of the disorder. The symptoms of yawning are evident in some, and of lethargy in others, who are not yet so far gone as to be kept from public worship.

I was willing to hope the Sunday sickness was a new complaint, and peculiar to these parts: but, it seems, there are but few places where the malady has not reached; and weariness of the sabbath appears to have been a rageing disorder among the Jews in the times of

their commonwealth ; though it is to be feared, it never was more prevalent and contagious than at present : and, I am sorry to say, its prevalence is, not a little, owing to the late attempts of a gentleman to prove that its effects are not to be dreaded.

In searching for the causes of these symptoms I have met with some considerable difficulty : but am now convinced, after the closest investigation, that they are generally brought on by excessive indulgence, and feeding without reserve on the sour fruits of the flesh, and the windy diet of the world. Persons, who sit for many hours together in close rooms with vain and carnal companions, are peculiarly liable to the malady ; and I have observed that a neglect of family and social religion on working days ; a great delight in cards and other games ; a frequent attendance upon balls, drinking-clubs, and stage-plays, are its common forerunners.

I am desirous that these particulars should be laid before the public, that they may serve to caution some persons of their danger, and that the skilful may be excited to seek out a remedy for the disease. Some have thought that the complaint is a moral rather than a natural one : it is however argued, on the other side, that the patients generally complain of a natural indisposition. What is to be done ? It is high time that physicians or divines should attend to the malady. I have sometimes thought of prescribing draughts and boluses to those who have told me that they could not come to church, or not come in time, or not keep awake while they were there : but when I have found them well, and active in their business, I have declined it for fear it should seem like forcing medicines. Had I been sure that worldly business or pleasure had detained them, I should have recommended the clergyman to attend to

their case : but when they talk of their infirmities, and indispositions, I do not know how he could address them. Perhaps it is necessary to hold a consultation of physicians and divines, that it may be determined to whom the patients belong, and whether the complaint is seated in the body or in the soul.

As the following admonition to sleepers is in some degree connected with the above paper, and I know not whether it has been before printed, I shall recommend it (as worthy of attention) to those whom it may concern. It was drawn up by a minister of great zeal, and I shall faithfully transcribe the copy before me, because though it may be rather in the rough, the style is peculiarly characteristic of the writer.

"The horrid habit of sleeping in some is the source of infinite pain to others. It damps, more than any thing else, the vivacity of a preacher: Constant sleepers are public nuisances, and deserve to be scourged out of a religious assembly, to which they are a constant disgrace. There are some, who have regularly attended a place of worship for seven years, twice a day, and yet have not heard one whole sermon in all the time. These dreamers are a constant distress to their preachers, and could sober reason operate on them, they would soon be reclaimed.

"In regard to health, would any but a stupid man choose such a place to sleep in ? In respect of character, what can be said for him who in his sleep makes mouths and wry faces ; and exhibits strange postures, and sometimes snores, and starts, and talks in his sleep, and renders himself ridiculous to the very children of the place ? Where is his prudence, when he gives malicious persons occasion to suspect him of gluttony, drunkenness, laziness, and such like causes of sleeping in the day-

time? Where is his breeding? He ought to respect the company present. What an offensive rudeness to sit down and sleep before them! Above all, where is his piety, and fear of God? There will come a period in the existence of this easy drone in which he will awake, and find the Philistines punishing the idler who was shorn in his sleep.

"Ministers have taken a number of methods to rid our assemblies of this odious practice—Some have reasoned—Some have spoken louder—Some have whispered—Some have threatened to name the sleeper, and have actually named him—Some have called fire—Some have left off preaching—Dr. Young sat down and wept—Bishop Aylmer took out his testament and read Greek. Each of these awaked the audience for the time: but the destruction of the habit belongs to the sleeper himself; and if neither reason nor religion can excite him, why he must sleep on till death and judgment awake him."

C. B.

God chooses what is best.

It is evident that God possesses infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. None will deny that he has these perfections. He would no longer be God, if he had not. If, then, he is a being of infinite wisdom, he must know what is best, under all possible circumstances. If he is a being of infinite goodness, he must choose, that what is best, under all circumstances, should take place. If he is a being of infinite power, nothing can prevent the accomplishment of what he chooses. We may conclude, therefore, that whatever does take place is for the best, and that God has, from eternity, invariably chosen that it should take place, just as it does.

To state this a little more at large:—The infinite wisdom and intelligence of God enable him to perceive what events will best promote the greatest good of the universe, or secure the highest sum of happiness among intelligent beings. And in this he cannot possibly be mistaken. Before he began to create, when all possible systems were before his mind, he could not but perceive which system would include and bring to pass the greatest sum of happiness. He saw things in all their connections and consequences. The smallest event could not escape his observation. The least conceivable occurrence was as clearly seen by him as the greatest. And if any event would mar the system, or occasion the least defect in it, he knew it perfectly well.—If the present system of events, taken as a whole, therefore, is not the best system, and does not include in it and bring to pass more happiness than any other possible system, and if all its parts are not the best calculated to promote the great end of the whole, and arranged in the best possible manner, it cannot be for the want of knowledge in God. He knew it as well before he began to operate, as he does now.

God is also infinite in goodness. When he contemplated the different possible systems of events, and saw which was best, which would include and promote the highest happiness of the universe, he could not but give that system the preference. He could not possibly reject the best and choose the worst. He could not prefer a less good to a greater good. To say God is infinite in goodness, and yet prefers a less good to a greater good, is a contradiction. God certainly chooses that the best system should be carried into effect. He certainly chooses that the greatest sum of happiness should be secured. He certainly chooses that those events should

take place which are best calculated to effect this. He certainly chooses that no event should take place by which the greatest good of the universe would suffer.—If, therefore, the present system is not the best, it is not that which God prefers. If any event which takes place is not, on the whole for the best, it takes place contrary to God's wish, it takes place, although he chooses it should not take place, it comes into existence in defiance of all that God can do to prevent it.

But this cannot be true, for God is always infinite in power. He is the Almighty. None can stay his hand, or resist his will. If he sees that an event is, on the whole, for the best, and chooses it should take place, he is able to bring it to pass. If he sees that an event is not for the best, and chooses it should not take place, he is able to prevent its taking place.

If, therefore, any supposable event is not for the best God's infinite wisdom enables him to perceive that it is not, his infinite goodness prompts him to prevent it, and his infinite power enables him to prevent it. And thus, we may conclude, with certainty, that no such event ever comes into existence. No event, therefore, ever takes place, but what is, on the whole, for the best.—But those events which are for the best, God chooses should take place. Therefore, whatever takes place, God chooses should take place, just it does.

The 4th petition in the Lord's Prayer.

Question. What do we pray for in the 4th petition?

Answer. In the 4th petition, (which is, "Give us this day our daily bread,") we pray, that of God's free gift, we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them.

Q. What is meant by bread in this petition ?

A. All temporal blessings, such as food, raiment, health, strength, agreeable relations, habitations, &c.

Q. Why are these called *bread* ?

A. Because, like bread, they are necessary for the welfare of our body.

Q. What measure of these temporal blessings may we pray for ?

A. A competent portion.

Q. What call you a competent portion of them ?

A. Such a portion as enableth us to live without being a burden to others ; or as much as tends to God's glory, and our good.

Q. What besides this competent portion do we request in this petition ?

A. God's blessing with it.

Q. What do you mean by God's blessing on temporal enjoyments ?

A. His prospering our endeavors to get them ; making us to see his love, bounty and faithfulness in them ; giving us contentment with, and comfort in them, and enabling us to thankfulness for them.

Q. Why are we in this petition taught to pray for *bread*, and not for dainty meat and riches ?

A. To teach us to be content with little.

Q. Why are we taught to pray for *daily*, and not for weekly and monthly bread ?

A. To teach us a constant dependence on God for temporal, as well as spiritual good things.

Q. Why are we taught to say, Give us *this day* our daily bread ?

A. To teach us to avoid covetous anxiety, and live every day as if it were our last.

Q. Why is the bread we are to pray for called *ours* ?

A. To teach us, that we must have a proper right to the bread we ask from God, or crave his blessing on.

Q. What right ought we to have to our temporal enjoyments?

A. A civil right before men, which even unbelievers often have; and a new covenant right before God, which only believers can have.

Q. What bread, and other temporal enjoyments, may we not ask from God, nor crave his blessing on?

A. What is gotten by idleness, deceit, and violence.

Q. Why do we ask our temporal enjoyments from God, when we labor for them with our hands?

A. Because it is God who giveth us opportunity and strength for labor, success in it, and a blessing with it.

Q. Is it not then a profane and beastly practice, to eat and drink without craving God's blessing on; and returning him thanks for our food?

A. Yes.

Q. Why are we to request our temporal mercies as God's free gift?

A. Because we deserve nothing at his hand, but wrath for our sin.

Q. How are the saints, when often so poor, said to inherit all things?

A. All things are theirs by covenant right, and do work for their good; and they enjoy as much as is sufficient for them.

Q. Whence then is it, that some saints in straits more readily doubt of their daily bread, than of their eternal salvation?

A. It proceeds from the carnality of their hearts.

POETRY.

I will remember the works of the Lord, surely I will remember thy wonders of old.—PS. LXXVII. 11.

Away, my doubts, be gone, my fear,
The wonders of the Lord appear,
The wonders that my Saviour wrought ;
O how delightful is the thought !

The wonders of redeeming love,
When first my heart was drawn above ;
When first I saw my Saviour's face,
And triumph'd in his pard'ning grace.

Pursue, my thoughts, this pleasing theme,
'Twas not a fancy nor a dream ;
'Twas grace descending from the skies,
And shall be mary'lous in my eyes.

Long had I mourn'd, like one forgot,
Long had my soul for comfort sought,
Jesus was witness to my tears,
And Jesus sweetly calm'd my fears.

He cleans'd my soul, he chang'd my dress,
And cloath'd me with his righteousness :
He spoke at once my sins forgiven,
And I rejoiced as if in Heaven.

How was I struck with sweet surprise,
While glory shone before my eyes !
How did I sing from day to day,
And wish'd to sing my soul away !

The world with all its pomp withdrew,
'Twas less than nothing in my view;
Redeeming love was all my theme,
And life appear'd an idle dream.

I gloried in my Saviour's grace ;
I sung my great Redeemer's praise ;
My soul now long'd to soar away,
And leave her tenement of clay.

The powers of hell in vain combin'd
To tempt or interrupt my mind ;
I saw, and sung, in joyful strains,
The monster, Satan, held in chains.

These are the wonders I record,
The marv'lous goodness of the Lord ;
O for a tongue to speak his praise,
To tell the triumphs of his grace !

Complaining of Spiritual Desertion.

WHAT ails this vile deceitful heart ?
Why do I thus from God depart ?
O how unstable do I prove !
How false and fickle is my love !

Wretched, I wander from the Lord,
His ways neglect, and slight his word,
Let sin and vanity invade,
And break the solemn vows I made.

Sure none are so defil'd with sin ;
None so unholy and unclean !
O'ercome with pride and every ill,
Viler I grow, and viler still.

In sad desertion now I mourn :
The Lord, my Comforter, is gone !
Offended, griev'd, He hides his face,
Nor can I see one glimpse of grace.

My mind what clouds of darkness veil,
Terrors on every side assail ;
By guilt oppress'd enslaved by fear,
My thoughts run out to meet despair.

And must I h̄e desponding lie ?
Why do I not for mercy cry ?
Forgive my sin, thou God of grace,
For Jesus' sake, unveil thy face !

Unworthy of the smallest good,
I plead a worthy Saviour's blood ;
On Him alone my hopes depend,
My Surety, Advocate, and Friend.

His blood can cleanse my soul anew,
His power can all my sins subdue ;
Behold Him, Lord, and set me free,
That I may live alone to Thee.

v.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE

CHRISTIAN VISITOR.

[¶] One number more will close the present volume of the Christian Visitor; after which time it will be discontinued. Persons in the areas are requested to call and adjust their bills.

FIELD & MARCY.

